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ABSTRACT

To determine the level of involvement in service learning among community colleges, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) conducted a national survey of over 1,100 colleges in spring 1995. The following institutional and program profile, based on responses from 773 institutions, emerged from the survey: (1) four out of five community colleges indicated that they were interested in service learning; (2) 75% of the respondents considered community service as part of their institutional mission; (3) rural colleges were more likely to have service learning programs than urban institutions; (4) most colleges relied heavily on institutional funds to implement service learning programs; (5) curricular areas varied, but social science and humanities courses were most likely to incorporate service activities; (6) 85% of colleges providing service learning activities offered up to 10 courses with a service option; (7) the most important reason cited by respondents for success with service learning programs was faculty support, followed by administrative support and community support; (8) insufficient funding and the absence of faculty release time were the two most significant impediments to success cited by respondents; and (9) service experiences were evaluated most frequently by examining agency evaluation forms or student activity logs. Contains 13 references. (Author/TGI)

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ED 394 612

Service Learning and Community Colleges: Where We Are. AACC Survey Report

By
Gail Robinson and Lynn Barnett
American Association of Community and Junior Colleges
Washington, DC

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AACC
American Association of Community Colleges

SURVEY REPORT

AACC-SR-96-1

SERVICE LEARNING

SERVICE LEARNING AND COMMUNITY COLLEGES: WHERE WE ARE

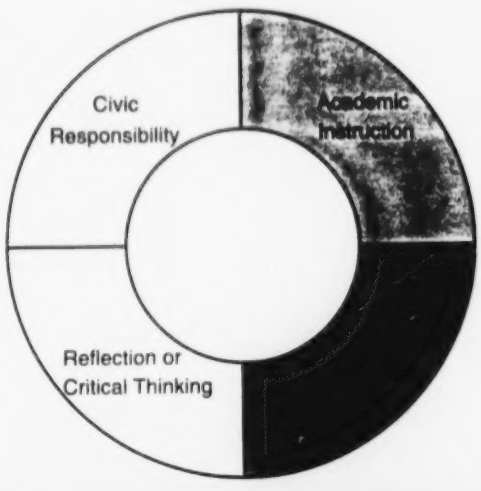
by Gail Robinson and Lynn Barnett

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To determine the level of involvement in service learning among community colleges, AACC conducted a national survey in spring 1995. This report summarizes the findings from that survey and from follow-up information obtained through May 1996. The following institutional and program profile emerged from AACC's survey:

- Four out of five community colleges are interested in service learning, either by actively using the methodology or wanting to do so.
- Seventy percent of community college respondents consider community service as part of their institutional mission.
- Rural colleges are currently more likely to have service learning programs than are urban or suburban institutions.
- Most colleges rely heavily on institutional funds to implement service learning programs, but some receive outside funding from government, community organizations, and foundations.
- Curricular areas vary but social science and humanities courses are the most likely to incorporate service.
- Eighty-five percent of service learning colleges offer up to ten courses with a service option.
- Service is mandatory in many courses, but very few institutions view community service as a graduation requirement.
- Faculty support is the most important reason service learning programs succeed, followed by community and administrative support. Insufficient funding and faculty release time are the two most significant impediments.
- Service learning programs are most often administered by student services personnel or individual faculty members in different disciplines.
- Most service learning colleges have five or fewer faculty teaching courses with service learning components.
- Classroom tools for reflection are most often class discussion and student journals. Service experiences are evaluated most frequently by agency evaluation forms or student activity logs.

SERVICE LEARNING



LEARN AND SERVE AMERICA

Service learning has been called a part of a revolution in American education (Rifkin, 1996a) and a focus point for rethinking the whole mission of education. A teaching method, service learning combines community service with academic instruction as it focuses on critical, reflective thinking and civic responsibility. Service learning programs involve students in organized community service that addresses local needs, while developing their academic skills, sense of civic responsibility, and commitment to the community. According to one economist, "the antidote to simulation and cyberspace is deep re-participation in community [i.e., service learning]" (Rifkin, 1996b).

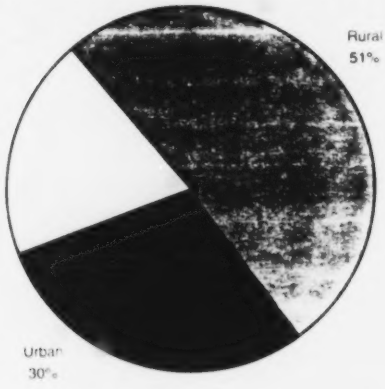
Methodology

The extent to which community colleges offered community service and service learning programs and resources was investigated in a 1995 national survey conducted by the American Association of Community Colleges as part of a *Learn and Serve America* grant from the Corporation for National Service. Service learning is defined as a pedagogy combining community service with academic instruction, focusing on critical, reflective thinking and civic responsibility. AACC's goal was to establish a baseline and to develop a comprehensive understanding of the role that community colleges play in this aspect of community service. Surveys were sent to more than 1,100 community colleges in the United States, and 719 colleges responded to the initial mailing. Respondents included college presidents, administrative and academic deans, faculty members, and student services staff. Follow-up activities through early 1996 brought the total to 773 institutions, representing more than 71 percent of AACC's member colleges.

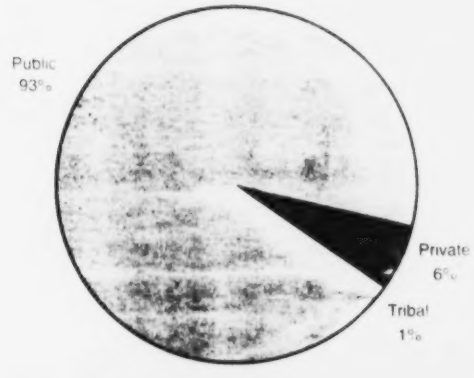
Institutional Profile

Most respondents were from public colleges, about half of which are located in rural areas. Institutional size (credit headcount) ranged from 400 to more than 20,000 students.

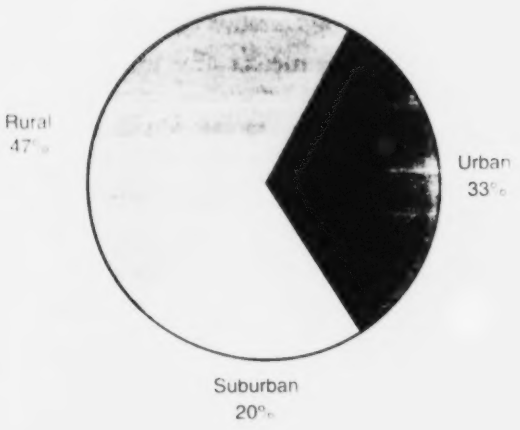
Geographic Distribution of Survey Respondents



Institutional Control of Respondents



Geographic Distribution of Community Colleges Offering Service Learning

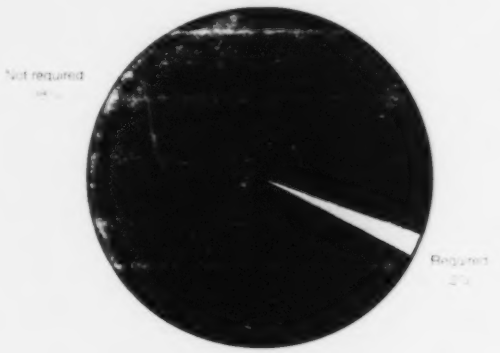


Volunteer Community Service Activities

Nearly half of all colleges house an office or group that places students in community service opportunities, but only one in five promotes college-wide service projects. Few colleges require students to perform community service to graduate, but comments from the field suggest that an increasing number are considering such requirements.

College-Wide Community Service Activity for Large Numbers of Students and Faculty

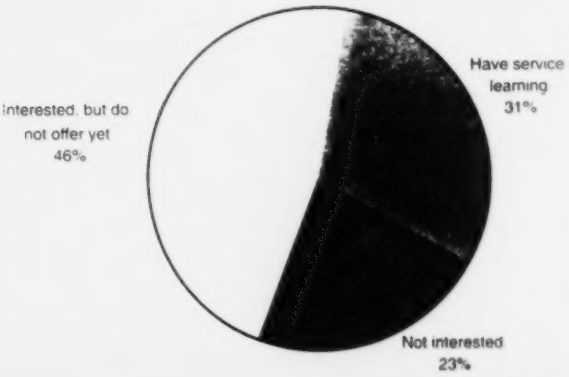
Community Service as a Graduation Requirement



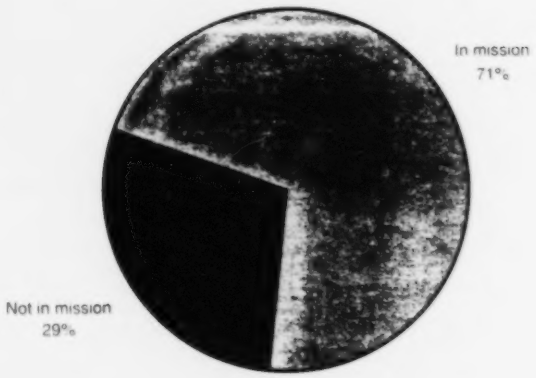
Service Learning Activities

According to the 1995 survey and follow-up information gathered through early 1996, 236 community colleges in 41 states—31 percent of respondents—offer service learning in a variety of courses. An additional 46 percent want service learning and are receptive to technical assistance. Many colleges in their first year of service learning also want technical assistance. Surprisingly, about one-third of all respondents reported that service was not part of their institutional mission, and one-fifth of all respondents indicated no interest in service learning. Twenty-five percent of all responding technical colleges offer service learning opportunities.

Community College Interest in Service Learning



Service in College Mission



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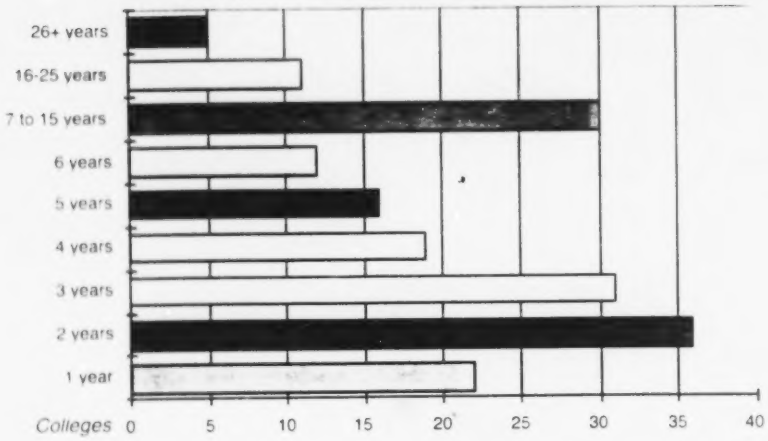
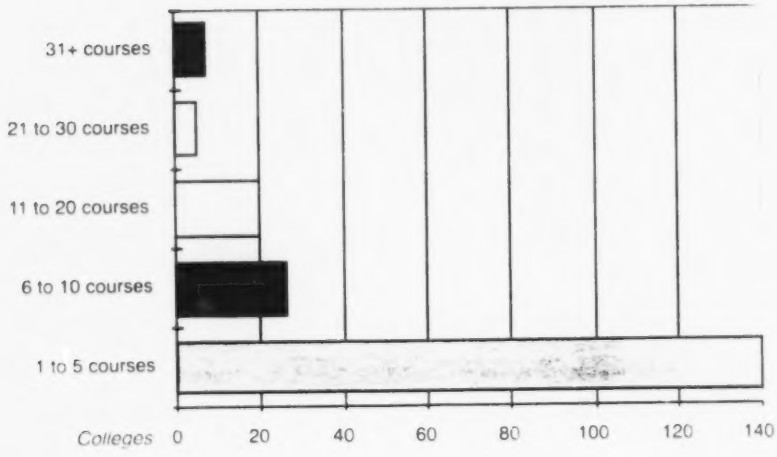
Most service learning programs are quite new, with 75 percent getting underway since 1990. However, 16 colleges reported beginning their programs in the 1960s and 1970s.

Reported Age of Service Learning Programs



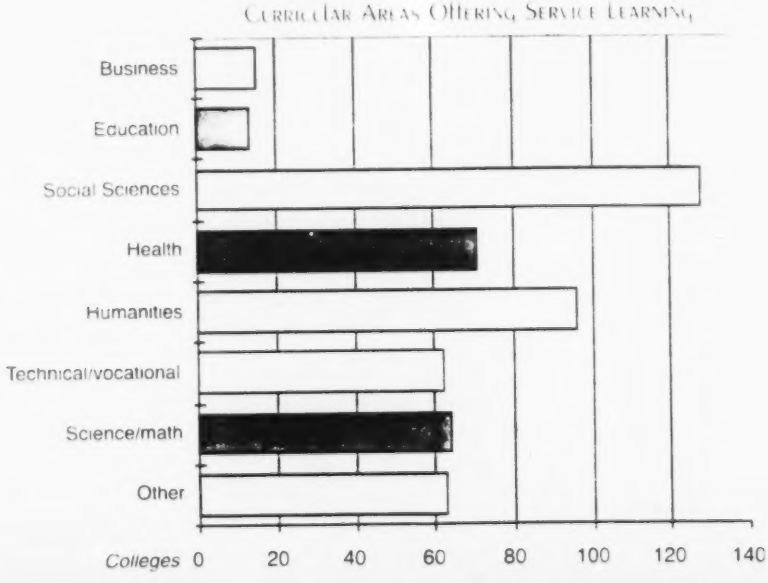
Number of Courses Per College with Service Learning Option



Thirty-seven percent of community colleges with service learning offer specific, stand-alone courses in community service; overall, 85 percent of colleges list up to 10 courses with service learning components.

Many colleges offer service learning in two or more courses. Curricular areas vary across the board, with social science and humanities courses the most likely to incorporate service.

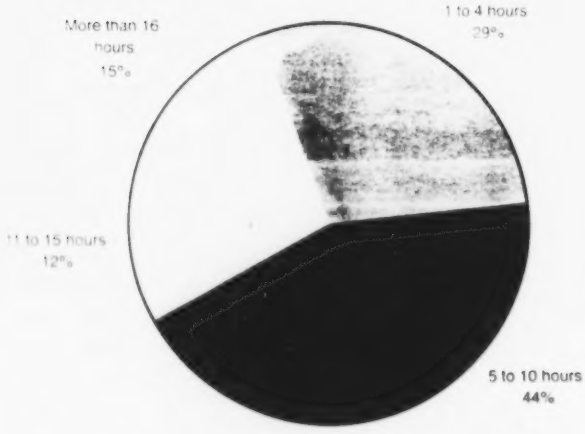
Curricular Areas Offering Service Learning



Student Participation

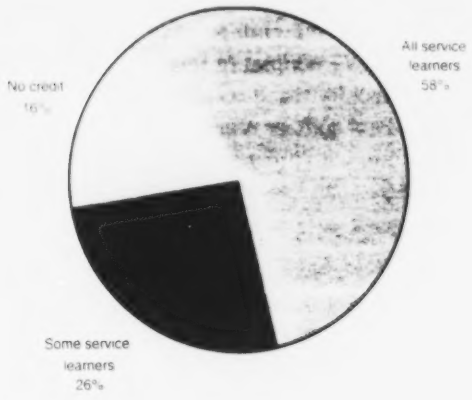
The number of students involved in service learning varies widely, often depending on the age or breadth of a given college's program. Overall, the average student performs fewer than 10 hours of community service per month. Some practitioners report that service learning's best promoters are its own students, who attract other students by word-of-mouth.

Typical Hours of Service Per Student Per Month

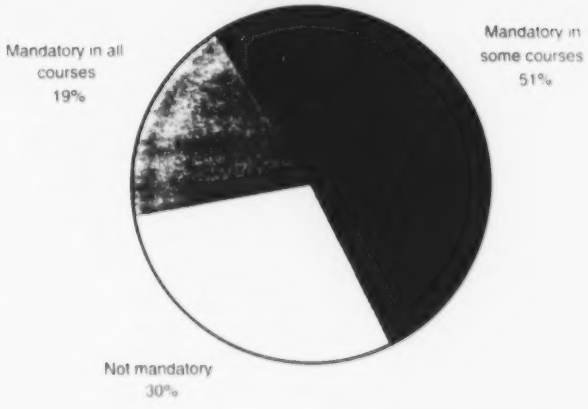


Service is mandatory in many courses, and students generally receive academic credit for service. Currently, few colleges include participation in service learning on student transcripts, but anecdotal evidence suggests this idea is increasing in popularity.

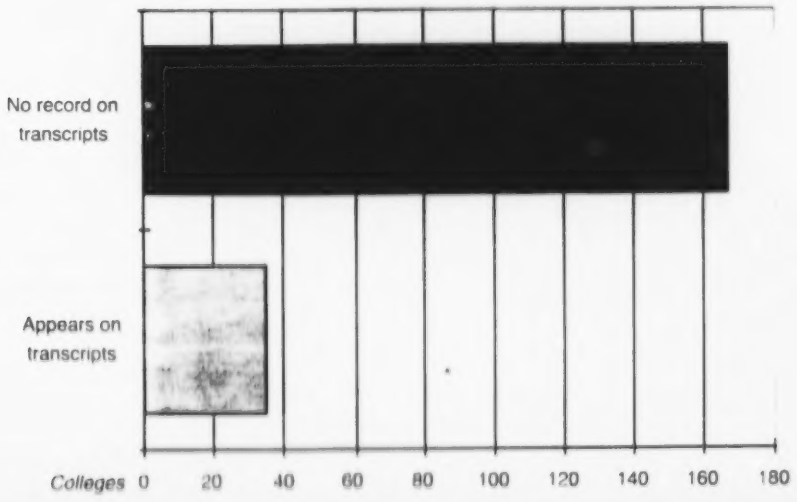
Academic Credit for Service Learning



Service Requirements in Service Learning Classes



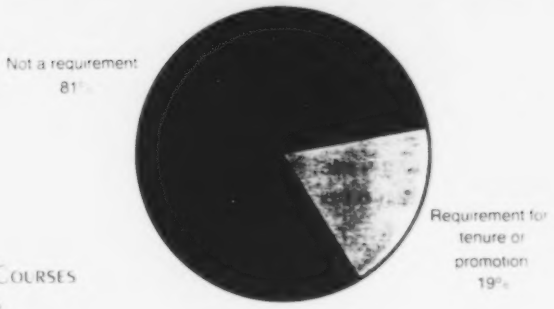
Service Learning on Transcripts



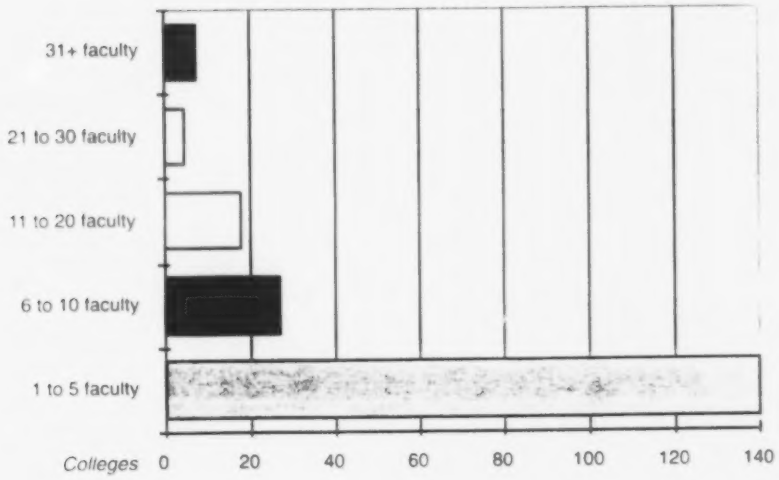
Faculty/Staff Participation

The majority of community colleges relies on only a few faculty to integrate service learning into the classroom: 71 percent of respondents reported that five or fewer faculty teach courses with service learning components. Few staff or administrators engage in service learning, with most institutions having less than five involved.

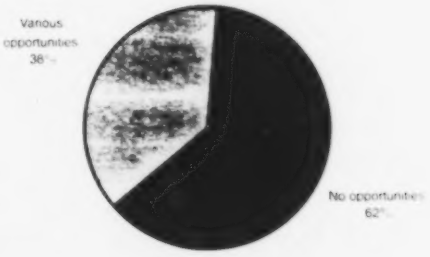
Community Service as a Requirement for Faculty Tenure or Promotion



Number of Faculty Per College Teaching Courses with Service Learning Components

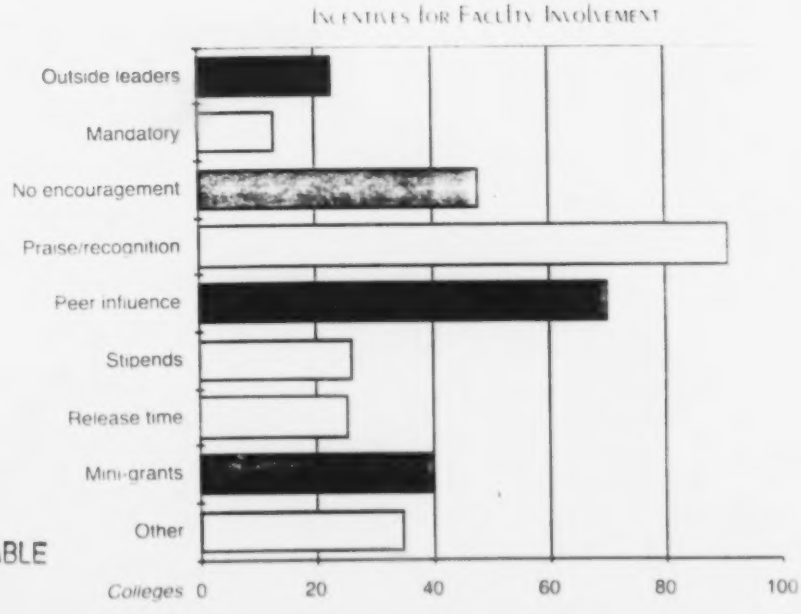


Opportunities for Faculty Development in Service Learning



Most faculty are encouraged to participate in service learning through praise, recognition, and peer influence. The least effective factor for participation is a mandatory requirement. More than one-third of all institutions offer faculty development opportunities, but community service does not tend to be a requirement for tenure or promotion.

Incentives for Faculty Involvement



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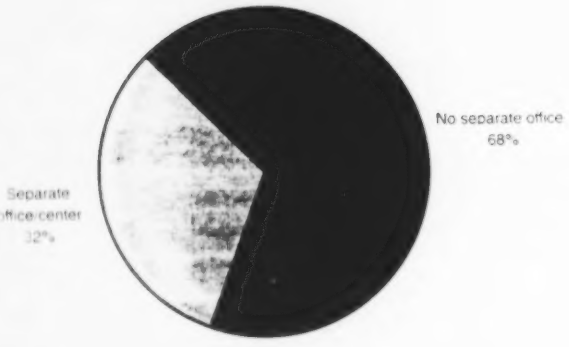
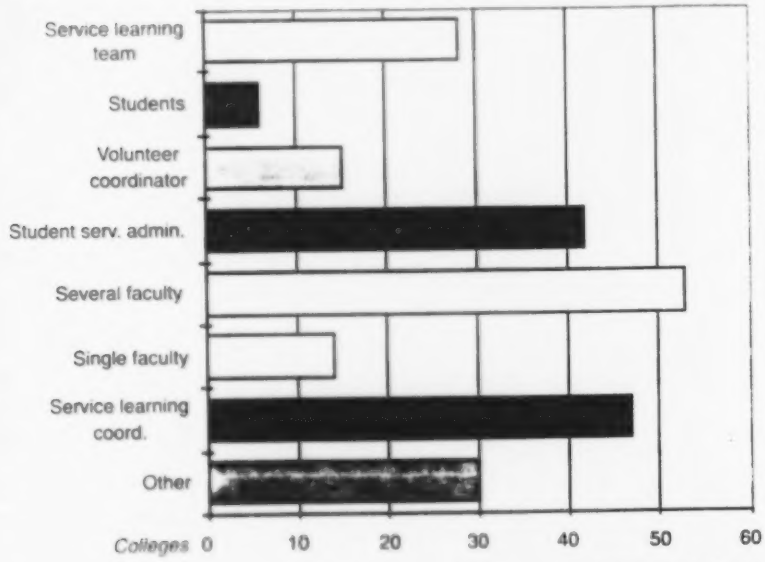
Program Administration

The primary people responsible for organizing service learning on campus are most likely to be student services or student life staff or individual faculty members in different disciplines. Thirty-two percent of colleges with service learning programs have a separate service learning center or office, which relieves the pressure on faculty to combine teaching and program administration. Anecdotal evidence indicates that a service learning team comprising faculty and designated staff may be the most effective way to integrate and institutionalize service learning over the long term.

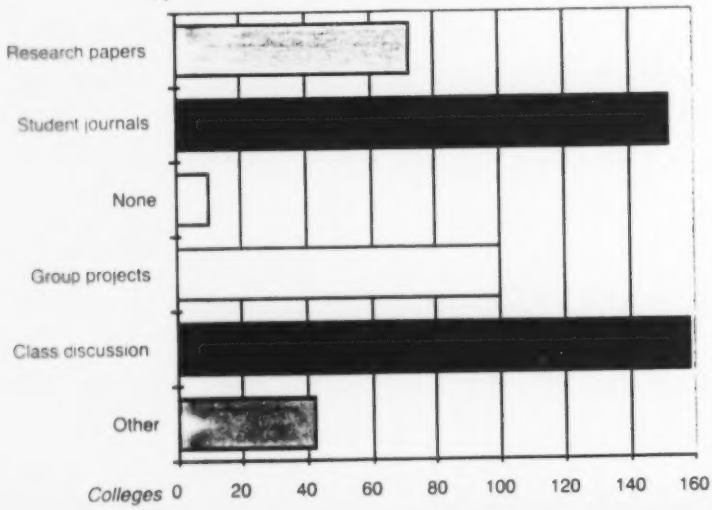
College Service Learning Centers or Offices



Management of Service Learning Activities



Types of Reflection Used in Service Learning Courses



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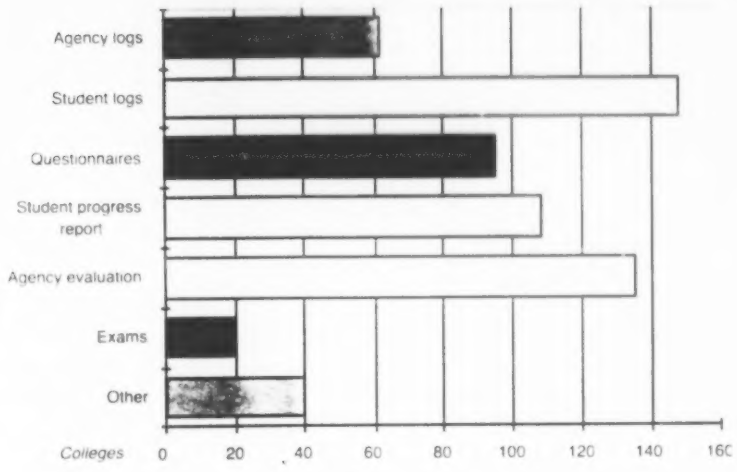
In the classroom, the most common tools used for reflection are class discussion and student-written journals, both of which are used by three-quarters of responding colleges. Evaluation forms (completed by community agencies) and accomplishment or activity logs (completed by students) are the methods utilized most often to evaluate students' service learning experiences.

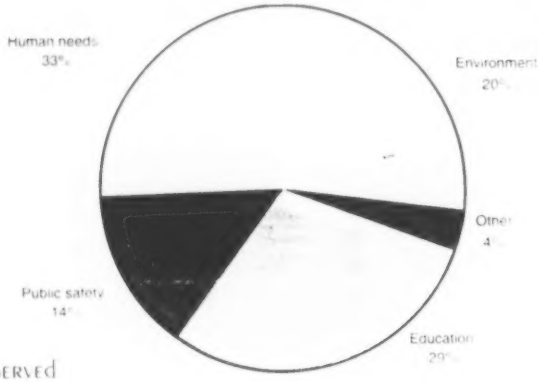
Assessment of Student Service Learning Experience



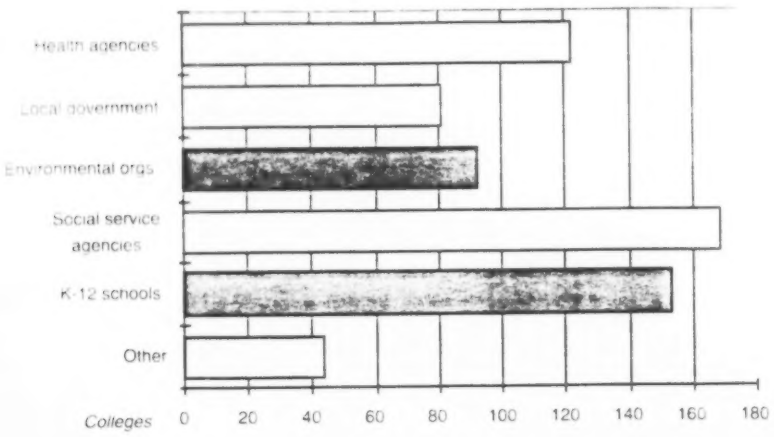
Outside Organizations

Community colleges' service learning activities address community needs primarily in the general categories of human needs and education, followed by environmental needs and public safety. To meet those needs, students work with K-12 schools, social service organizations, and health agencies, as selected by a college's service learning coordinator or team.

Areas of Community Service



Types of Community Organizations Served



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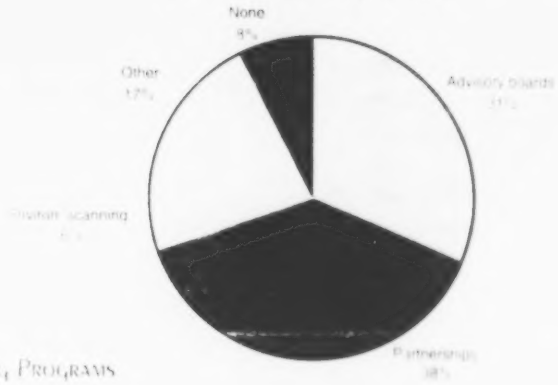
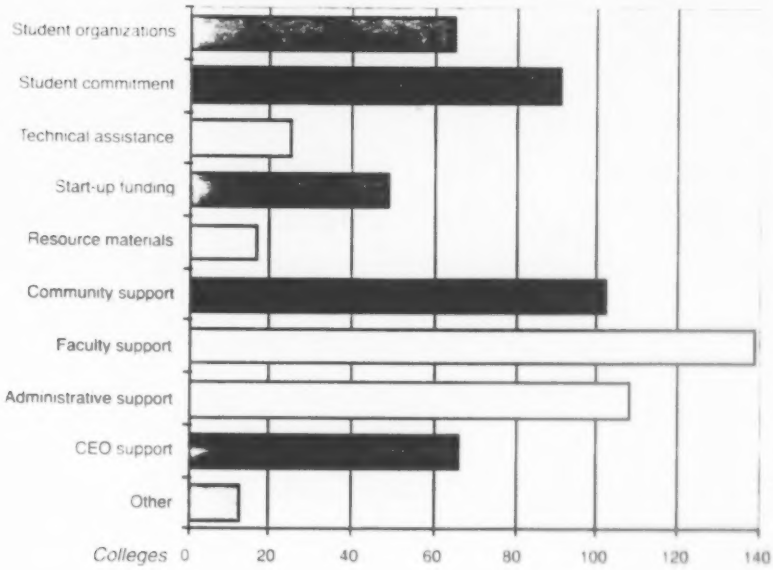
Program Development

Community colleges receive assistance in planning and feedback on activities underway in a variety of ways, most often through partnerships and advisory boards, but also through other means such as personal contacts and direct agency requests.

Sources of Community Input

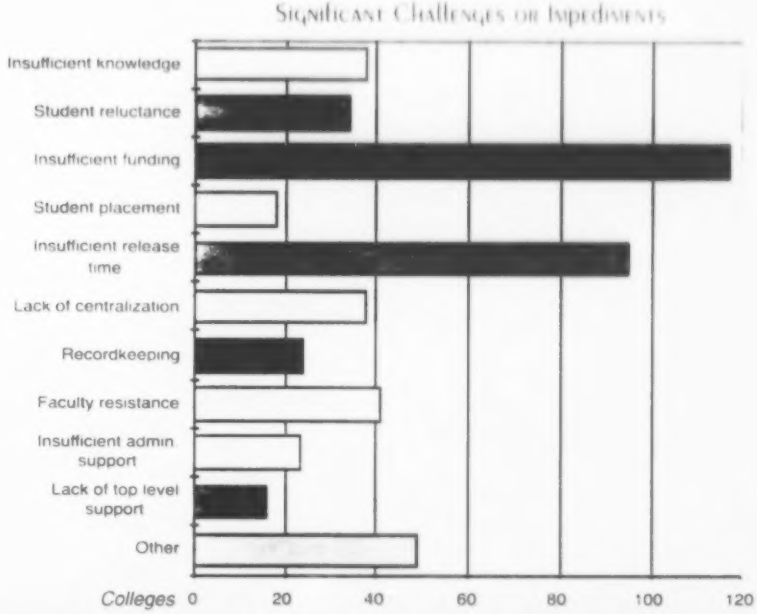


Factors in Success of Service Learning Programs



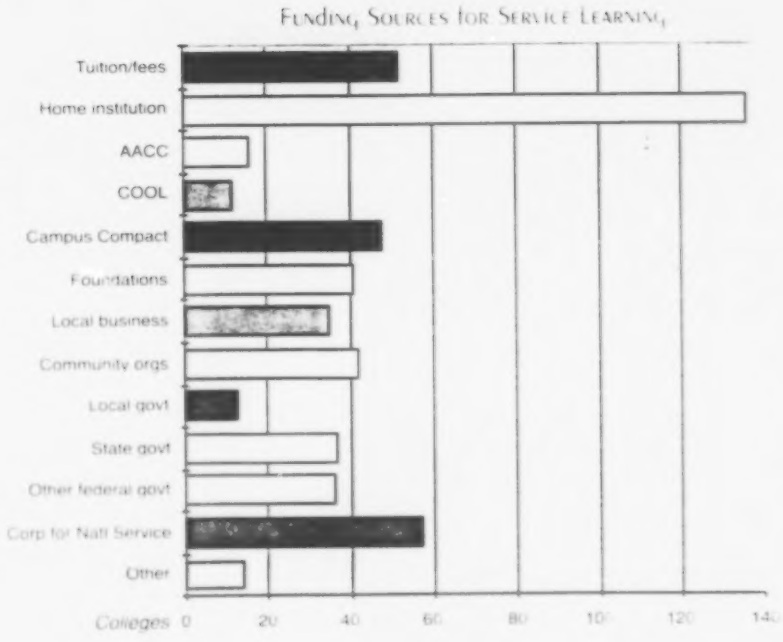
Faculty, administrative, and community support are the most important factors that make a service learning program successful; resource materials, the least important. While faculty support is seen as the most significant factor contributing to the success of service learning programs, insufficient release time is the second most significant impediment to service learning activities. The highest-ranked impediment is insufficient funding to initiate and sustain service learning activities.

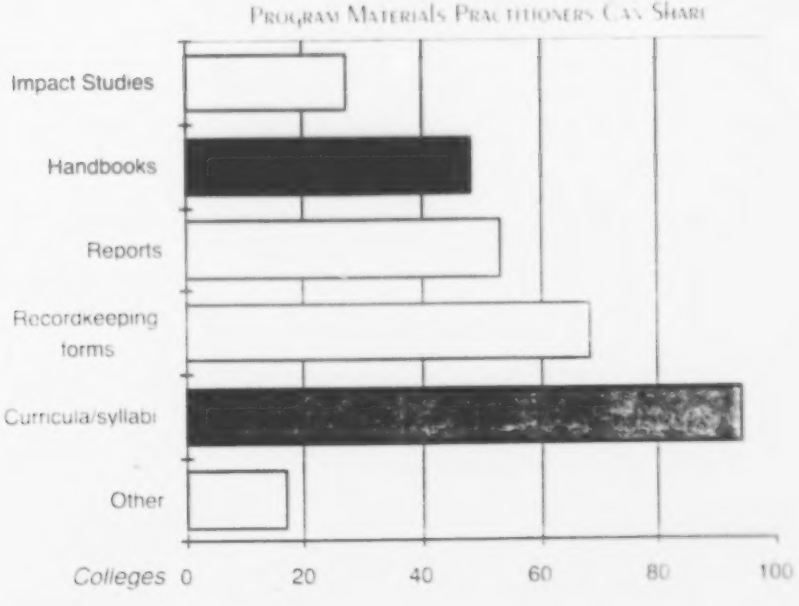
Significant Challenges or Impediments



Comments from the field suggest that community colleges would benefit from making more time available, even to a single faculty member on a given campus, to help a service learning program to get underway. Once a program is established, the biggest hurdles are behind, and the need for release time may be lessened.

Although insufficient funding is cited as the number one challenge for service learning programs, a variety of outside sources for financial assistance are available, including governmental sources, community organizations, and foundations. The college itself is the most frequent source of support for service learning.





Community colleges traditionally are receptive to networking and sharing information, and this tendency appears to hold true in the service learning field. When asked about materials they would be willing to share, service learning faculty and administrators most often referred to curricula/syllabi and recordkeeping forms, as well as reports and handbooks. Some institutions are producing student, faculty, and agency handbooks; some also have videos that describe their service learning programs.

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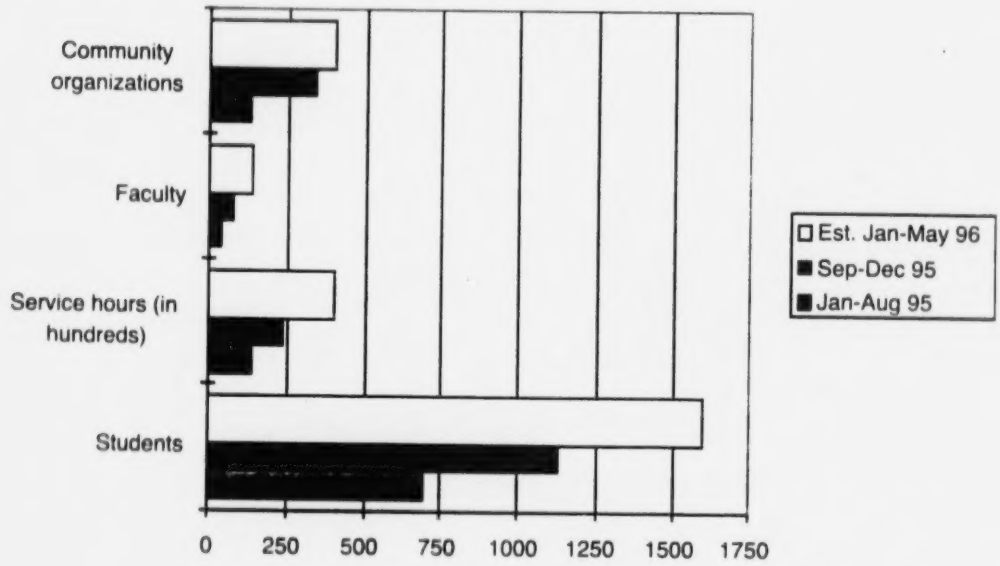
AACC Service Learning Colleges

The AACC Service Learning Colleges, selected as grantees in AACC's *Learn and Serve America* program, experienced tremendous growth in faculty and student involvement in service learning in their first full year. Starting from virtually no service learning activities in 1994, the eleven colleges reported in December 1995 the involvement of 79 faculty, 1,129 students, and 339 community service agencies. The students provided more than 24,000 hours of direct community service. Estimates for the first quarter of 1996 indicate involvement at a level approaching three times that of the first quarter of 1995. The AACC Service Learning Colleges receive technical assistance through a mentor team, conferences, and an Internet listserv.

AACC Learn and Serve America Colleges Trends, January 1995–May 1996



Conclusions

Given the increasing public interest in service learning as evidenced by the emergence of grant-making from the Corporation for National Service and philosophical support from leading thinkers such as Jeremy Rifkin and Robert Coles, it will be important to assess service learning program implementation again in two or three years. Preliminary evidence suggests that start-up funding and, more importantly, early technical assistance can have a significant impact on program development. In many cases personal contacts through networking opportunities will be sufficient, but they, too, will take a little more time to be more widely identifiable. Several of the community colleges that had expressed an interest in service learning in the spring 1995 survey have succeeded in integrating it into coursework in the past year. And even more colleges that were previously unaware of or uninterested in service learning now want to incorporate it into their academic offerings.

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Internet Resources

AACC Service Learning Clearinghouse
http://www.aacc.nche.edu/spcproj/service/service.htm

Campus Compact National Center for Community Colleges
http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/academic/compact

Campus Outreach Opportunity League
http://www.cool2serve.org/homeofc/home.html

Corporation for National Service
http://www.cns.gov

Maricopa Community College District
http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/sl/

National Service-Learning Cooperative Clearinghouse
http://www.nicsl.coled.umn.edu

Partnership for Service Learning
http://www.studyabroad.com/psl/pslhome.html

The Service Learning Files
http://csf.colorado.edu/sl/

For further information on the AACC survey results or for sample service learning materials, contact:

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